

How to care for poinsettias

Poinsettias as part of a real Michigan Christmas

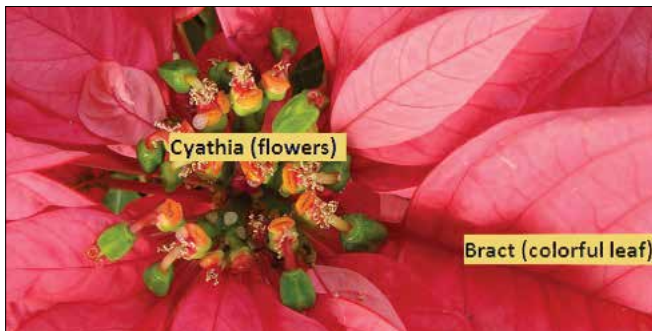
Joel Poinsett was the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico, where poinsettias are native. He brought plants back to South Carolina in 1828 and is credited for naming the popular holiday plant (and founding the Smithsonian Institution). In 2010, Michigan ranked 7th nationally in poinsettia production growing almost 2.4 million poinsettia plants of a wholesale value over \$9.2 million. When you purchase a real poinsettia, check to see where it was grown. It may very well have been produced on a Michigan farm by a Michigan grower.

Are poinsettias poisonous?

No! While they are not meant to be eaten, they are safe to display in your home. Studies have shown that poinsettia plants are not poisonous. In fact, a 1996 study published in the *American Journal of Emergency Medicine* reported no fatalities in more than 22,000 accidental ingestions, 93 percent of which involved children. However, some people may be allergic to the milky sap called latex and small pets may choke on fibrous leaves.

How do I select a poinsettia?

Look for dark, green leaves throughout the plant, fully colored bracts, and few open yellow flowers (see diagram). Don't buy plants if they



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Leaves curl on this cultivar, 'Winter Rose.'

are already in a sleeve or displayed in a crowded manner. Avoid wilted plants, even though the media is moist. Protect plants from cold wind (temperatures colder than 50°F) with a sleeve. Carefully unwrap the poinsettia when you get it home.

What kind should I buy?

Traditional red, white, and pink poinsettias are readily available, but there are also several unusual cultivars on the market now. For example, there is a curly cultivar named 'Winter Rose' and a multi-colored one called 'Holly Point.' You can even spray glitter on poinsettias to add even more sparkle to your holidays!

How do I care for poinsettias in my home?

Poinsettias are living plants, so they need sunlight and water. Like most houseplants, it is best to display the plants in bright but indirect sunlight for 5 or more hours. Water when the soil/media becomes dry to the touch. If you're comfortable in the room, poinsettias are too

(60 to 70°F). Only fertilize after the blooming period has ended, sometime between March and May.

Can I get my poinsettia to rebloom next year?

You may want to leave it up to the professionals and add your poinsettia to the compost pile after the flowers fade. Or, be ready for some work. Cut the poinsettia plant back half way in April. By the end of May, new shoots should have emerged. Put the plant outside after danger of frost has past. Prune again in June to keep it bushy and compact. Water and lightly fertilize during this period of active growth from May through the end of summer. Poinsettias flower in response to the length of the night so, by October 1, you need to put the plant in complete darkness for 14 continuous hours (5:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.) **EVERY** night with 6 to 8 hours of bright sunlight. Doing that daily procedure should produce flowers for Christmas.



Above, a blue poinsettia. At right, 'Peppermint Twist.' Below, 'Holly Point.'



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